

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Sweasey Theater / Loew's State Theater

other names/site number State Theater; Arkley Center for the Performing Arts

**2. Location**

street & number 412 G Street ☐ not for publication N/A

city or town Eureka ☐ vicinity N/A

state California code CA county Humboldt code 95501 zip code

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☐ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. ( ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

California Office of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the  
National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the  
National Register

☐ removed from the National  
Register

☐ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

### Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture / Theater

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture / Theater

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals

Other: Eclectic, Beaux Arts, Sullivaneseque & Mission

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

roof Asphalt

walls Reinforced Concrete

other

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

#### Entertainment/Recreation

#### Architecture

### Period of Significance

1920 - 1929

### Significant Dates

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

### Cultural Affiliation

### Architect/Builder

Reid Brothers

Franklin Georgeson

### Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☒ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository:

Humboldt County Library; Humboldt Co. Historical Society; Humboldt State University Library

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** Less than 1 acre

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	—	—	—	3	—	—	—
2	—	—	—	4	—	—	—

☐ See continuation sheet.

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kathleen Stanton

organization Preservation Consultant

date February 2, 2009

street & number P.O. Box 185

telephone 707-826-9000

city or town Bayside

state CA

zip code 95524

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name CUE II, LLC, Robin Pickering Arkley II, President

street & number 323 Fifth Street

telephone 707-476-1000

city or town Eureka

state CA

zip code 95524

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Summary Paragraph**

The Sweasey Theater / Loew's State Theater (Loew's State Theater) in Eureka, California is now the Arkley Center for the Performing Arts. The theater's design is a product of the Eclectic Movement that was popular in America from 1890 to 1920 and is an exceptional example of the Reid Brothers' craftsmanship and architectural ability. Loew's State Theater was extensively rehabilitated using the Tax Certification process and was approved by the National Park Service on June 24, 2003. Character-defining features have been rehabilitated according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The intricate cast concrete ornament on the facade has been faithfully restored and the entry, second story windows and interior of the theater have been renovated to provide a state of the art performance center. Although changes have occurred, the renovation is clearly respectful of the theater's architectural integrity and conveys a strong association with the past in its location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship. Today, the beautiful Loew's State Theater towers above Eureka's skyline as a restored landmark representing the outstanding work of master architects, James and Merritt Reid, and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century development of modern theaters in Eureka.

**Location and Setting**

Loew's State Theater is located in downtown Eureka on scenic Humboldt Bay approximately 270 miles north of San Francisco. The property address is 412 G Street, situated between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets, the primary north/south thoroughfares through town. The theater building covers the entire parcel which measures 70 feet wide (facing G Street) by 120 feet along the adjacent alley. The parcel is located on Block 46 which was considered one of the best business blocks in the city during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and still remains a desirable commercial location in the heart of the downtown business district. The theater is located one block south of Eureka's Old Town National Register Historic District.

Adjacent to the theater is Redwood Capital Bank located at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and G Streets which is a newer Neo-Victorian style building. To the south of the theater at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and G Streets is an older building hidden beneath a modern "slip cover" facade. To the rear of the theater at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and F Streets is a large parking lot that was once the site of Daly's Department Store. At the southwest corner of the block, (5<sup>th</sup> and F Streets) is the 1902 Gross Building. Along 5<sup>th</sup> Street between F and G Streets

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are several single-story buildings that are not visible from the front of the theater. Across the street, on the east side of G, is a large parking lot and a single-story structure that fronts Fifth Street.

The neighborhood surrounding Loew's State Theater still retains many large, historic buildings that are recognized as architecturally significant by the Eureka Heritage Society and include: the 1892 Pythian Castle at 615 Fourth Street (three stories); the 1902 Gross Building at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and F Streets (two stories); the 1922 Masonic Temple (four stories) designed by local architect, Franklin Georgeson, who was also the associate architect for Loew's State Theater; the 1909 former Elks Hall at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and H Streets (four stories) and the magnificent 1909 Federal Building and Post Office (three stories). Recently the Eureka Heritage Society and Eureka Main Street honored Loew's State Theater and its neighbor, the Masonic Temple, with brass markers identifying their historic and architectural significance. The downtown commercial core has been greatly enhanced by the preservation of these community landmarks.

Loew's State Theater's downtown location set it apart from the majority of early theaters in Eureka which were all "North of Fourth." The City's early 20<sup>th</sup> century theaters: the Rialto (1918), Loew's State (1920) and the Eureka (1939), were all located in the downtown district (south of 4<sup>th</sup> Street) as opposed to the Old Town area associated with Eureka's historic waterfront. It is significant that these modern theaters broke with the past in their location, architecture and interior design.

**Architectural Description**

The architectural design of Loew's State Theater is best described as "Eclectic" because of the stylistic mix of Beaux Arts, Sullivanesque and Mission features. The ornament on the front facade is made from cast concrete and includes decorative garlands, shields, arched window hoods with elaborate cartouche emblems and twin balconets with tracery design. This "exuberant surface ornamentation" is characteristic of the Beaux Arts style.

The most striking architectural feature of the theater's facade is attributed to the Sullivanesque style. The central composition of the upper facade is a unique combination of bold geometric bands that frame three flat, paneled arches. In contrast,

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the stucco body of the facade with twin towers and shaped parapet roof are designed in the Mission style. The cast concrete "drips" found on the towers and above the inscription at the top of the building appear Art Deco.

The structure is a large rectangle of reinforced concrete with several different roof heights. At the front, the stucco masonry walls rise approximately four stories to a shaped parapet with wide coping. The roofing beyond this facade is a torch down membrane and continues the length of the building. At the back of the building, where the fly gallery is located, the exterior masonry wall rises approximately 70 feet, equivalent to a six-story building. The middle area of the structure, which includes the auditorium, is about three stories tall. The building has a full basement that was constructed as part of the First Congregational Church and Parsonage that were previously on the site.

## Front Facade

The renovation of Loew's State Theater was done in consultation with the Office of Historic Preservation as a tax rehabilitation project. The work was completed following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation in June 2007 and included a seismic retrofit; repairs to the exterior cast concrete ornament and restoration of missing pieces; new second story windows and entry doors; restoration of the 1920 metal marquee and ticket booth, and the replacement of flag poles on the parapet roof.

The cast concrete ornament on the building is only found on the front facade. Some portions were cracking or spalling due to moisture penetration and rust. Other portions like the shields above the balconets were missing and reconstructed with the help of historic photographs. Students in the Historic Preservation Program at College of the Redwoods created molds of the decorative ornament in order to recast missing or damaged pieces in a lighter fiberglass material. What masonry could be repaired was retained, and only damaged or missing pieces were replaced with fiberglass replicas.

The front entry, which had been completely altered by the 1950s theater modernization and again by the 1970s department store conversion, was reconstructed to simulate the original 1920 design. New construction was differentiated by the use of modern materials. An early 1920s post card entitled "Loew's State Theatre, Eureka, Cal." guided the work.

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Originally the first floor facade had an entrance with eight double doors and central ticket booth; three storefronts (two at the south end and one on the north); and an alcove with stairwell for emergency exits. Today there are six entry doors to accommodate a wider ticket booth and comply with code requirements for ingress and egress. Although the ticket booth is larger, it resembles the original and projects several feet from the center of the lobby entrance. The glass doors have grids to simulate divided lights and all the door and window frames are made of dark bronzed metal to match the marquee. Above the doors and ticket booth are sixteen transom lights with glue chip glass.

The three small shops at the street level had been previously removed and these spaces were redesigned with picture windows and transoms to provide a larger lobby and theater office. A metal moment frame for the seismic retrofit is visible through the window on the south end of the lobby and at the north end, the original emergency exit with steel stairs was retained.

The new metal marquee was designed using the 1920 postcard as a model and is suspended from the building by four cables like the original. Single light fixtures positioned above and below the corners illuminate the sign which has Arkley Center for the Performing Arts printed in gold letters at the top.

Above the marquee, on the second story, is a row of tall windows arranged in a horizontal band which is a character defining feature found on several theaters designed by the Reid Brothers. Three sets of casement windows are centered directly above the marquee and two others are located on the side towers. Each double casement measures seven and a half feet tall and five feet wide and has one operable and one fixed window with ten divided lights below a four light transom. These new, bronze colored, metal windows match the marquee and entry.

Above the three center windows is a tripartite "arcade" of flat panel arches with swag ornaments and shields that fills the central body of the facade. (A similar series of arched tripartite panels are repeated on the interior of the auditorium.) Surrounding this dramatic design are two bands of cast concrete ornament with bold geometric pattern. The design is distinctly Sullivan-esque and central to the building's architectural significance.



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Inscribed near the top of the center parapet is the date of construction, 1920, and the name of the owner and financier of the theater, Richard Sweasey. The raised inscription is framed in a rectangular-shaped area, delicately decorated with curvilinear filigree and small cartouche. Above this feature are four rectangular "drips" centered between several Beaux Arts swags. A roof flagpole heightens the dramatic effect of the eclectic design.

Two tall towers flank the body of the facade and rise above the central parapet. Each has a second story window similar to the three in the middle which is capped by segmented arches with center cartouche. A slim, spiraled column or "rope" rises alongside each window to a three-sided balconet at the top of the tower. The circular tracery at the center of this feature is Gothic in origin. Above this, a large shield with lions' head and twin torches protrudes above the edge of the stepped parapet. Each tower has a roof flagpole to accentuate the drama of the building's height and ornament.

The front facade is painted a harmonious three-tone color scheme that accentuates the structure's tripartite design. The body of the building is painted a cream color that continues on the north and south facades. The cast concrete ornament is a terra cotta color and the wide coping on the parapet is painted dark forest green.

*South Alley Facade*

The ground level of the alley facade is finished in stucco for the first 32 feet and painted with a mural, designed as a youth arts project by local artist, Duane Flatmo. The remaining 88 feet is unfinished concrete with visible lines from the original form boards. Two shallow buttresses, measuring two feet eight inches across and six inches deep, help support the massive masonry wall. An emergency exit from the auditorium to the alley is located near the center of the ground-level facade.

From the second story to the rooftop, the exterior wall is finished in stucco. Near the front of the building there are two fixed windows for the women's bathroom and a doorway from the balcony that leads to a fire escape with pulley and concrete counter weight. At the back, the fly gallery measures 44 feet wide along the alley facade and rises approximately 70 feet, nearly six stories. The outlines of several old doorways and windows that have been filled-in with concrete add visual interest to the facade. Two concrete splash blocks for the roof downspouts drain to the alley and appear original.

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**West Rear Facade**

Like the alley facade, the rear part of the building shows evidence of horizontal and vertical form boards from the original construction. At the southwest corner is a remnant of brick wall that was once part of the adjacent Sinclair Brick Block Building which is no longer there. An overhead door for the loading dock and an exit door are the only openings on this wall. A full facade mural, 70 feet high, covers the entire rear wall and was completed in 2007 by artist, Duane Flatmo.

**North Side Facade**

This facade is only visible from a distance due to the construction of the adjacent two-story bank building. It has a smooth stucco finish with no openings.

**Changes to the Theater**

Two fires in 1929 and 1943, as well as periodic redecorating, altered the original interior of the theater. Additional interior and exterior alterations were made in 1973 when the building became part of Daly's Department Store. From 1998 to 2003, the building sat empty and continued to deteriorate with a leaking roof, no heat and no maintenance.

In 2003 the Arkley family purchased the theater, restored the magnificent facade and provided the community with a much needed state-of-the-art performance center. The ambitious renovation began with the goal to restore the building as much as possible to its original appearance. Equally important was the desire to create a state-of-the-art performance venue. Phase I of the project addressed the restoration of the exterior facade which was completed in 2005. Phase II focused on the interior renovation which neared completion in 2006. On February 2, 2007 the Arkley Performing Arts Center opened with a gala performance featuring singer/ songwriter, Kenny Rogers, and an open house with public tours the following day

**Interior Description**

In 2003, the deteriorated interior of the department store was removed and vestiges of several original features were exposed including the lobby staircases with original wrought iron handrails; the stage with ornamental columns and proscenium arch; the fly gallery with stairwells and landings; twin organ alcoves; orchestra pit, and the rusticated plaster walls with decorative arches, pilasters and coved ceiling.

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Lobby

The lobby is 32 feet wide and 58 feet long. A concession bar is located at the south end and a ticket office is at the other end. The front portion of the entry floor is tiled and has a small central ticket booth that extends into the lobby several feet. The back portion of the room has carpeting with a vintage floral design that is continued throughout the theater. The walls are painted a soft gold color with burgundy and gold trim to match the carpets. Ten wrought iron chandeliers with acanthus leaf design, small black shades and crystal pendants hang from the ceiling. Matching wall sconces with small shades are placed throughout the room. Two restrooms located off the lobby have cream-colored tile floors and wainscoting like the other six in the theater. Two sets of double doors lead into the main auditorium and at either end of the lobby are two sweeping staircases that lead to the mezzanine lobby. The staircases retain their original configurations with landings and decorative wrought iron handrails.

Auditorium

The lower level of the auditorium can accommodate 355 people. The plush seats have a vintage appearance with decorative metal frames, wooden arm rests and cut velvet upholstery. The aisles are carpeted and the area beneath the seats has linoleum flooring. Suspended from the 40-foot ceiling are six large wrought iron chandeliers that match the smaller ones in the lobby. Recessed ceiling lights also help illuminate the large space.

The unique masonry walls inside the auditorium are original and scored to resemble rusticated stone. Each "stone block" measures 3 feet by 1 foot and is laid in a running bond pattern. A thin line of black paint accentuates the joints between each block. This faux feature is characteristic of Beaux Arts design where rusticated masonry walls with exaggerated joints are typical.

On either side of the auditorium, three massive "stone" arches, measuring eight feet across, rise above the rusticated wainscoting. Within each arch is a large, flat panel similar to the three found on the front facade, except that these are graduated in size. The full panel at the front of the auditorium is 12.5 feet high, the middle panel measures 8.5 feet high and the shortest panel at the balcony level is 4.5 feet high.

Between each arch is a wide two-foot pilaster that projects slightly from the wall and is painted dark burgundy. The pilasters rise to the top of the coved ceiling and continue

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across to the other side of the theater where the arched pattern is repeated. The strong tripartite design dramatizes the height of the auditorium and accentuates the slope of the floor. At the back of the auditorium is an open sound booth that measures 17 feet in length and 8 feet in width. The area is separated from the seating by a short stem wall.

Organ Alcoves

Two original organ alcoves were found on either side of the stage. The interior floors, walls and ceiling were covered with tongue and groove redwood that was likely installed after the 1929 fire. With the help of an historic photo dating from the 1940s, the classical design of the alcoves was reconstructed and includes pilasters, crown molding and cherubs made of cast concrete. The circular tracery in the central arch is a stylized interpretation of the intricate frescoes that once embellished the openings now covered by sheer curtains and velvet drapery.

Stage, Orchestra Pit and Fly Gallery

The stage is 35 feet across and is 27.5 feet deep. Below it is the original orchestra pit, four feet deep, eight feet wide and 35 feet long. The area is covered with a removable floor that can extend the stage area. The back wall of the stage has an overhead door for loading and unloading and an exit door. The original proscenium arch and masonry columns were preserved and the highly ornamental areas painted bright gold to highlight the detailed acanthus leaf, grape and ribbon design.

The fly gallery above the stage is 55 feet high to the grid above. A narrow set of 28 stairs located on either side of the stage leads to the landings constructed 25 feet above. These landings were used to hold the sand bags that raised and lowered the scenery for the vaudeville shows. The theater also has a cyclorama movie screen that hangs at the back of the fly gallery.

Back Stage Basement

Two stairways lead from the stage to the full basement where the dressing rooms are located. The sloped auditorium floor is made of concrete which also acts as the ceiling for the basement. Beneath the stage is the "Green Room," reserved for the star of the show. It measures 10 feet x 17 feet and has wall-to-wall carpeting, mirrored walls, granite counters for the dressing table and wet bar and an acoustical tile ceiling.

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Next door is Dressing Room "A," for the female cast which measures 33 feet x 16 feet and has linoleum floors and laminate countertops for dressing tables. Beyond this area are two restrooms, a shower room and three utility closets. Down the hall and beneath the auditorium is Dressing Room "B," for the male cast. The room measures 24 feet x 24 feet and also has an adjacent storage room. Across the hall is a large office with additional storage. Beneath the main lobby is the Artist Level Lobby with two rest rooms, concession bar and commercial kitchen. A staircase leads from this area up to the street-level lobby.

Mezzanine, Loge and Balcony

This area measures 17 feet x 58 feet and includes two restrooms and a concession bar. The carpeted room has four chandeliers and five large windows that look out onto G Street with a view of East Eureka. Beyond a set of double doors and up a short flight of stairs is the Loge with 108 seats in four rows. The ceiling measures 23 feet from here and the curvilinear balcony was rebuilt to resemble the shape of the original. Behind the loge is the balcony seating with 307 seats in twelve rows. The walls and coved ceiling in this area are heavily textured.

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**Statement of Significance**

**Summary Paragraph**

Sweasey Theater / Loew's State Theater (State Theater), located in Humboldt County, California, qualifies for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its contribution to the history of theater development in Eureka and Humboldt County, and under Criterion C for its notable architecture and association with master architects, James and Merritt Reid, of San Francisco. The theater is an expression of masterful artistry and an eclectic design which combines Beaux Arts, Sullivanesque and Mission features. The theater's period of significance begins with its opening in 1920 as a modern playhouse for vaudeville and cinema and concludes with Humboldt County's first "talkies," shown at the State on April 5, 1929. A disastrous fire closed the State five months later and, within days, its position as the only venue for "talkies" was eclipsed by the Rialto Theater.

**Criterion A:** Association with events that have made a significant contribution to local history.

**Context:** Entertainment/Recreation

**EUREKA'S THEATER HISTORY (1866-1920)**

The history of theater in Eureka reflects the early development of live performance and cinema for Humboldt County. Founded in 1850 as a supply post during the Gold Rush, Eureka quickly became an established community with churches and schools in addition to its sawmills and saloons. By 1856, the city was incorporated and became the county seat for Humboldt.

**Eureka's Early Theatres (1866 – 1891)**

Local theater groups and traveling stock companies from San Francisco and beyond presented serious plays, popular comedies and farces in large halls and opera houses beginning in the mid 1870s. Ryan's Hall, established in 1866, was the first known theater in Eureka. Others included: the Eureka Theater (1870); Pratt's Opera House (1873); Russ Hall (1881), which also operated as the Unique Theater (1903) and Gustin's Opera House (1904); Fagan's Opera House (1885), also known as Baird's

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Opera House; and the Ingomar Theatre (1891), the most opulent show house in Eureka's history.

**Early Picture Programs**

Programs depicting picture-postcard scenes of far away places or factual accounts of important events were standard fare for early cinema. Picture programs were first presented at Russ Hall and the Occidental Theatre in 1898. The San Francisco Camera Club gave a slide lecture that included "150 beautiful illustrations" at Russ Hall, and the Occidental Theater presented "The Battle of Manila Told In Pictures." These "picture plays" or "photoplay" performances preceded the development of the first moving pictures.

**Eureka's First Moving Pictures (1899-1903)**

Film historians credit 1895 with the Birth of the Movies, but it wasn't until 1899 that moving pictures were introduced to Humboldt. A show at the Ingomar Theatre in November 1899 consisting of "... 15 new and well selected moving pictures projected onto a curtain at the footlights..." is the first known presentation of moving pictures in Humboldt County.

In 1901 a program at Russ Hall showed life-like motion pictures of the Galveston Flood and later that year, "a biograph exhibition...of moving pictures" was shown at a new theater called The Wonderland. By 1903 the Ingomar Theater was presenting "The Assassination of President McKinley" and the Occidental Pavilion advertised Bradshaw's moving picture entertainment. His unusual program was "not the ordinary dancing, flickering, shabby pictures shown so often," but 150 minutes of "beautiful, clear and distinct" moving pictures without "that quivering and snow storm effect... so painful to the eyes..."

**Storefront Theaters/Nickelodeons (1904-1915)**

Nickelodeons began in Pittsburgh in 1905 and were the first nickel theaters in America that showed moving pictures exclusively. Although Eureka's storefront theaters were never exclusively movie houses, they had attributes similar to the popular nickelodeons. They offered family entertainment and cheap admission, and the proprietors strove to reflect the social aspirations of the middle class.

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Nine storefront theaters appeared in Eureka between 1904 and 1914 which correlates with the heyday of nickelodeon theaters. These early storefront theatres were all located in Eureka's Old Town, "North of Fourth." Veteran theater man, Joshua Vansant, recalled that many theaters just "sprang up, ran for a few months and closed. It seemed as though every time there was an empty store building someone would move in and start a show house. Then the first thing we knew they'd be gone."

Many theaters during this time opened, went dark and then reopened as "New" theatrical enterprises including the E Street Theatre which was torn down for the New Margarita Theatre that became the Imperial. Girton's New Theatre was also known as the Empire, Orpheus, Orpheum and Liberty. The Cineograph was sold to the Pettingills who operated it as the Pastime. The Lyric or F Street Theatre became the Sequoia, Grand, Portola and Strand theaters. The Optigraph Theater; the Novelty Theater; the Bell and the Colonial appear to have been singularly named and short lived.

**End of An Era**

After the turn of the century, the large halls and "opera houses" had become passé. Gustin's Opera House and the Occidental Pavilion closed by 1908 and the renowned Ingomar Theater went dark with the passing of William Carson in 1912. The magnificent theater officially closed its doors in 1923.

**Modern Theaters (1913 – 1920)**

By 1913, grander movie theaters were developing throughout the country and replacing nickelodeons and storefront theaters. With the advent of feature films and longer programs, audiences wanted larger, more comfortable theaters with good heating and ventilation, perfect picture projection, girl ushers, a ladies lounge and orchestral accompaniment, not mechanical music.

Five storefront theaters operated during this time and strongly competed with one another. The Colonial, Pastime, Imperial, Empire and Lyric all showed vaudeville and film programs. Only the Orpheus (previously the Empire) survived the transition from storefront theater to modern playhouse to compete with Eureka's two new modern theaters, the Rialto (1918) and the State (1920).



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**The Rialto**

**Eureka's First Motion Picture Theatre (1918)**

In late 1917, a group of local investors announced plans to construct a modern movie theater in Eureka and six months later on June 25, 1918, the Rialto opened its doors. Howard Sheehan and Lewis Lurie of the Rialto Theater in San Francisco were the first managers of the new theater. It seated 1200 people and had the first Wurlitzer Hope-Jones orchestra organ in Humboldt County.

**Loew's State Theater**

**Eureka's First Modern Playhouse (1920 – 1929)**

In June 1919, the Eureka press announced that a new Hippodrome Theater would be built for vaudeville and motion picture entertainment. The theater would become part of the Hippodrome circuit affiliated with Marcus Loew and managed by his employees, Ackerman and Harris of San Francisco. The Hippodrome Corporation hired the famous Reid Brothers to draw the plans with Associate Architect, Franklin Georgeson, assisting with building specifications and supervising construction.

The building was designed as a modern "playhouse" to include vaudeville and road shows as well as movies. The plans included dressing rooms, property rooms, stage, retiring rooms and other features not found in Eureka's old vaudeville houses, but a modern requirement for "legitimate theater." The Hippodrome Corporation supplied the "seats, furnishings, property and stage effects" and the property owner, Richard Sweasey, built the theater. In September 1919 contractor Victor Anderson obtained a building permit for a theater estimated at \$50,000 to construct.

Site preparation began in August, 1919 with the demolition of an auto garage, formerly a part of the Fashion Stables that originally covered the entire quarter block. It was anticipated that the theater would be largely constructed by winter "to afford protection from the rainy weather," but by June, only the exterior was nearing completion and plasterers and decorators were beginning the interior finish. August 1920 was the new completion date, but construction delays moved the opening to October and then December. Loew's State Theater took nearly 18 months to construct whereas the Rialto (1918) and Eureka Inn (1922) took just six months to complete. It's unclear what

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caused the delays, but a news report indicated problems with a labor shortage. This would not be the first difficulty for the new theater.

Principal Architect, James Reid, came from San Francisco to inspect the theater shortly before it opened December 16, 1920 to "capacity crowds." The program included a little bit of everything: a dramatic sketch, vocal soloist, accordion music, aerialists, a "photoplay"(or movie) called "The Branding Iron" and a Buster Keaton comedy. Initially, adult admission was 33 cents for matinees, 55 cents for general seating and 83 cents for the loges. Children were admitted for 22 cents. In comparison, the Rialto was only 30 cents for adult admission and tickets at the Orpheus were 25 cents. Loew's management defended the high cost as a "prevailing price," but found it wasn't sustainable given the competition. Six months after opening, Loew's State Theater cut prices to compete with their rival, the Rialto. Press reports claimed they were losing money and by August the theater went dark.

Success or failure in the theater business depended on a manager's ability to provide what the public wanted to see at an affordable price. Eight months after opening, Loew's State Theater was under new management. William Kellner was replaced by W.J. Clark from San Francisco and George Mann, his theatrical booking agent. The theater was no longer advertised as Loew's, but the State. Despite these changes, advertisement for the State practically stopped in June 1922 and the theater remained dark for nearly four months. It reopened in November, but only on Saturday nights. "New Managers Take Charge of Theaters" was the title of the article announcing that the State would become part of a theater chain run by George Mann and Frederick Frisk of San Francisco. They purchased Eureka's three theater businesses: the Rialto, the State and the Orpheus, essentially controlling Eureka's entertainment industry. Eventually George Mann owned and operated a theater empire that extended throughout Northern California. It was known by various names including The George M. Mann Theaters and Redwood Theaters, Incorporated.

On April 5, 1929 local newspapers proudly reported, "The Talkies Are Here." Four films including "Leatherneck," "The Belle of Samoa," "The Family Picnic" (a talking comedy) and "The Kentucky Jubilee Singer" gave local theatergoers their first opportunity to hear actors speak as if sound were coming "directly out of their lips." The synchronization of

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sound and picture was an amazing technological achievement for cinema and an equally significant experience for Humboldt audiences.

**Historical Description**

An historical description of the building relates the impressive nature of the exterior architecture, its artistic interior design and large seating capacity. Edwin Morris, manager of the Hippodrome Theater in San Francisco, arrived in Eureka for the theater's opening, December 16, 1920 and told the local press that he was astonished to find such a theatre here. "I had expected to find a comparatively small and plainly built theatre of the country type. On the contrary, last evening I walked into a house that would awaken admiration upon the part of the most exacting theater goers of San Francisco."

The plasterers, interior decorators and finish artists came from San Francisco and were also "surprised to find such a theatre in a town no larger than Eureka." The building was hailed by the press as a "Work of Art" that would compare favorably "with any theatre in San Francisco or Los Angeles...in design and finish..." The interior frescoes were designed and painted by L. Brusatori, a graduate of fine art from the Royal Academy of Milan, who was considered "one of the best frescoe artists on the coast" at that time.

It is not surprising that Eureka's most modern theater could easily compare to many in San Francisco given Richard Sweasey's business there, the Reid Brothers' design expertise, and Franklin Georgeson's Bay Area architectural training. The stellar combination produced a stunning showhouse that embodied Eureka's proud history of live entertainment and fascination with movies.

**Richard Sweasey, Theater Owner and Financier**

Richard Sweasey may be best remembered as the man responsible for the construction of Loew's State Theater in 1920. His name is memorialized on the theater's beautiful facade, which is unlike any other in Humboldt County.

Richard Sweasey was known as "one of the best businessmen" in Eureka with a reputation for success and competition. He was a man who liked "fast steamships and fast horses... and generally had them." Not easily "outdone by anyone," his competitive

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nature and business savvy led to his financial success as a capitalist, shipbuilder, grocer, dairyman, politician, and banker. His various business ventures encompassed major aspects of commercial, fraternal, financial, civic and social development in Eureka and Humboldt County.

Richard Sweasey was owner and President of the Humboldt Steamship Company, a passenger transportation business with regular routes to San Francisco. Sweasey spent time in the City during his youth and throughout his business career so he knew about the popular appeal of motion pictures and vaudeville and decided to capitalize on their popularity in far-off Eureka. Despite the construction of the Rialto Theater in 1918, Sweasey felt there was room for growth with a lavish, state-of-the-art theater.

He had stiff competition from a group of local investors called the Northern California Investment Company who hired Howard Sheehan and Lewis Lurie of the Rialto in San Francisco to run Eureka's Rialto. Despite the challenge and his advancing age (76), Richard Sweasey began the theater project, gambling on its success. Ten years later, he bequeathed his theater to his heirs who received substantial income throughout the depression from his wise investment. When he died in 1929, his real estate and personal property were valued in excess of \$100,000. Sweasey had gambled correctly when he undertook the construction of something "newer and better" than anything previously built in the city - the monumental Loew's State Theater.

**Criterion C:** Loew's State Theater represents the work of master architects, James and Merritt Reid, of San Francisco and is also significant for its Eclectic Style facade which possesses high artistic value.

**I. Context: Reid Brothers, Principal Architects, San Francisco**

Theater design was a significant part of the Reid Brothers 52-year career beginning in 1880. They designed at least 30 known theaters beginning in 1884 with the construction of the Opera House in Crawfordsville, Indiana. Their last theater was the Sebastiani cinema in Sonoma, California completed in 1933 after Merritt's death in 1932. During the Reids' long and prolific career, they designed at least 176 known buildings that were

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constructed primarily in Evansville, Indiana (37), San Diego (33), San Francisco (67) and other cities in Northern California (17).

The Reid Brothers architectural firm began in Evansville, Indiana in 1880. James Reid was the eldest of the three brothers, the principal architect and driving force of the firm. He studied architecture in Boston, graduated from McGill University and went to the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He was also the genius that brought the Reid Brothers national fame with the construction of the Coronado Hotel in San Diego.

In 1886 (at the request of Elisha Babcock, a native of Evansville and business partner of the Coronado Beach Company) James went to Southern California where he designed the famous beach hotel. Completed in 1888, the Shingle Style structure also included a theater and frescoed music room. Today, the architectural masterpiece is recognized as a National Historic Landmark. What the Willard Library did to promote the Reid Brothers, the Coronado Hotel did to insure their reputation as "architects of extraordinary ability."

Beginning in Evansville, Indiana the Reids designed at least 36 buildings from 1880 to 1891 including Victorian style residences, the famed Willard Library (listed on the National Register in 1972), churches, opera houses, schools, hotels, and commercial buildings. During this period, the brothers favored the fashionable Gothic Revival, Venetian Revival and Romanesque styles.

The Reid Brothers second theater was the 1889 Grand Opera House in Evansville. Built at a cost of \$500,000, the Romanesque Revival theater seated 1700 people and its jeweled ceiling interior with gold coloring, metal wall ornaments and beveled glass doors was unrivaled in the Midwest.

In 1890 Merritt Reid joined James in San Francisco where the two brothers established one of the most important architectural firms in the city. The Reid Brothers designed at least 67 buildings in San Francisco including the original Fairmont Hotel, the Fitzhugh Building, the Hale Brothers Department Store and the Cliff House. When James and Merritt completed the celebrated Call Building on Market Street in 1897, it was selected for the American Architectural Exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exhibition. It was San Francisco's first skyscraper with 18 stories and a terra cotta dome with flagpole. Due to

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the Reids' exceptional engineering, the building survived the devastating 1906 earthquake with little damage.

Between 1889 and 1902, the Reids designed three more theaters or "Opera Houses" in Evansville, Pittsburgh, and San Diego. These buildings were narrow, massive structures constructed of rusticated stone and brick in the Romanesque style. Their next theater, however, was altogether different. The Rialto in San Francisco with its reinforced concrete construction and refined Beaux Arts design was a significant departure from the massive Romanesque style of their previous Opera Houses.

The Rialto, later known as the Embassy, was built between 1905 and 1907 due to the 1906 earthquake and was the first of eleven known theaters designed by the Reids in San Francisco. It was also the only San Francisco theater to withstand both the 1906 and 1989 earthquakes. Like the Call Building, the structural survival of the Rialto was a testament to the Reids' engineering skill.

In 1918 the Reids began a prolific period (1918 – 1932), designing theaters in Northern California. Loew's State Theater was one of four theaters designed by the Reids and built in 1920. The other three were located in Modesto, Fresno, and Gilroy. During the course of this research, twenty-five theaters in California were identified as Reid Brothers theaters. Eleven have been identified in San Francisco, four in Oakland and ten others in Modesto, Gilroy, Fresno, Eureka, Martinez, Monterey, San Rafael, Redwood City, Merced and Sonoma. Some of these theaters have been demolished or are threatened with demolition, which adds to the significance of those that remain, including Loew's State Theatre in Eureka.

Seven theaters designed by the Reid Brothers had features that compared to Loew's State Theater and include: Modesto's 1920 Strand Theatre (demolished); Fresno's 1920 Hippodrome Theater (demolished); San Francisco's Coliseum (1918), Harding (1926), and Avenue (1927) theaters; the 1922 State Theatre in Martinez (extant) and the 1926 Golden State Theatre in Monterey (restored).

The architecture of these theaters has been described as Art Deco, Moorish, Churrigueresque and Spanish Colonial. Although they are individually distinct, they do share some similar structural and design characteristics. All are built of reinforced

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concrete, have three or four stories with massive facades, a strong tripartite design that includes flat panel decoration, tall side towers, and flagpole(s) along the roof. It is primarily the unique design of the roof parapets and architectural ornament that significantly differentiates one theater from another.

1920 Strand Theater, Modesto

The Strand was built the same year as Loew's State Theater and appears from an historic photo to be very similar in shape and scale, but there is less ornament. Like the State, there was a second-story row of divided light windows above the marquee; blank arched panels arranged in a tripartite design; bull's eye windows at the top; and a shaped parapet roof. The theater was larger than the State with 1800 seats and was built at a cost of \$250,000. Left vacant for many years, it was demolished after a fire in 1984.

1920 Hippodrome Theater, Fresno

An historic streetscape photograph of this theater taken in 1920 shows similar attributes to Loew's State Theater. It was four stories high with a massive flat facade and prominent center parapet. A series of arched second story windows appear recessed and resemble a mission arcade. In comparison, the building has much less ornament and is a Spanish Eclectic design.

1926 Golden State Theater, Monterey

The Golden State Theater in Monterey has an elaborately carved facade described as "Moorish Castle" or Spanish Eclectic. The heavily encrusted Churrigueresque decoration resembles a religious shrine or an 18<sup>th</sup> century Spanish cathedral. Although the theater has a larger seating capacity, its facade lacks the monumental scale and mass of Loew's State Theater.

1918 Coliseum Theater, San Francisco

The body of the Coliseum is less elaborate than the State's and has an unusual blend of Art Deco and Beaux Arts design. Since its conversion to condominiums, the front and

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side facades have been significantly altered with the addition of many windows.

1922 State Theater, Martinez

The theater's austere facade lacks the ornamental exuberance of Loew's State Theater and resembles an abstract form of Art Nouveau. The intended minimalism includes a row of arched windows above the entry, a single bull's eye window with slight floral decoration and a flat parapet roof. Although the front facade has been preserved (minus the marquee), the conversion of the theater into a three-story office building has altered the sides with the addition of numerous windows.

1926 Harding Theater, San Francisco

The Harding has an austere eclectic facade compared to the exuberance of the State's decorative detail. Similarities include a ribbon of multi-light second-story windows and strong tripartite design with blank arched panels. The central section has a large recessed arch with delicate tracery that resembles an oversized gothic window. San Francisco's theater community is actively working to "SAVE THE HARDING!" from demolition.

1927 Avenue Theater, San Francisco

Photographs of the Avenue Theater reveal a Spanish Eclectic facade with a shaped parapet roof, low relief "Plateresque" ornament and niches. The front has the same monumental scale and mass as Eureka's Loew's State Theater and originally had five flagpoles on the roof!

Franklin Georgeson, Associate Architect

Franklin Thompson Georgeson was the Associate Architect from Eureka who worked with the Reid Brothers on the construction of Loew's State Theater. Although some newspaper articles credit Georgeson with the handsome design, building specifications and other news reports identify the Reid Brothers of San Francisco as the principal architects.



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Franklin T. Georgeson was born in San Francisco in 1889 and grew up in Eureka where he graduated from high school in June 1906. He returned to the Bay Area that year to study architecture at U.C. Berkeley and graduated in 1910. The devastation of the 1906 earthquake and subsequent reconstruction of San Francisco and Oakland undoubtedly influenced his technical training leading to his proficiency with reinforced concrete and other modern building materials.

After Georgeson graduated from Berkeley, he worked for two years with several San Francisco architectural firms before returning to Eureka to begin his own practice. His early work in Humboldt reflects the influence of popular Bay Area styles which he incorporated in his diverse designs. Both the Shingle Style Millay House in Eureka (1912) and the Neoclassical Minor Theater in Arcata (1914) with stucco siding are well known landmarks recognized for their exceptional design, craftsmanship and use of materials. Georgeson's career was interrupted by World War I, but by January 1918, he was back in business with offices in the Georgeson Building in Eureka.

It is not clear when Georgeson's association with the Reid Brothers began, but he would have been familiar with their work given their reputation. During his studies at Berkeley, he would have read professional journals like The Architect and Engineer of California, which often published information on Reid Brothers' buildings. He may even have toured their 1908 Beaux Arts Exhibition in San Francisco or attended the first annual AIA meeting, which James Reid coordinated in 1910.

Georgeson became a licensed architect in 1915 and retained a close connection with San Francisco architects throughout his prolific career. He designed the Coast Counties Booth for San Francisco's 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition, creating a "stir" with his unique redwood log house and redwood stump.

Beside his association with the Reid Brothers in the construction of the State, Georgeson supervised the 1922 construction of the Tudor-style Eureka Inn, designed by San Francisco architect Fredrick Whitton. After World War II he opened a second office in San Francisco with associate architects, Frank Trabucco and Lewis Hurlbut.

Georgeson passed away in 1953 at age 64 and was widely known in Eureka and San Francisco as a prolific architect. His appreciation for modern architecture and building practices is evident in the many schools, hospitals, churches, residences, theaters and

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commercial buildings he designed throughout Northern California.

**Architectural Significance**

Loew's State Theater is a product of the Eclectic movement (1890 to 1915) when architects experimented with fanciful combinations of styles that produced unusual buildings. According to McAlester and McAlester, these architectural mixtures involved many different period and modern styles "that vie with one another in a sort of friendly competition." Loew's State Theater does not fit any one particular architectural type, but reflects several stylistic traditions including Beaux Arts, Sullivanese, and Mission.

The term Beaux Arts is used here to describe the entire period of elaborate eclectic styles popular from 1885-1920 as defined by McAlester and McAlester. This eclecticism was advocated by architects like James Reid who studied at France's Ecole des Beaux-Arts. European-trained architects who were designing fashionable buildings for wealthy clients favored Beaux Arts architecture because of its association with America's industrial barons. The Reids' use of this style was an affirmation of Richard Sweasey's success as a businessman and financier, boldly announced by the placement of his name and date on the building's grand facade.

The Beaux Arts features of Loew's State Theater include masonry walls, flat roof, symmetrical facade, elaborate border panels with low-relief carving, floral swags, shields, decorated window crowns, large arches, pilasters and rusticated stone. The use of new 20<sup>th</sup> century materials like stucco, reinforced and cast concrete on the interior and exterior of the theater made it possible to recreate masonry facades that were classically inspired by Old World European landmarks.

The Reids were also influenced by master architect Louis Sullivan whose masonry buildings and Chicago skyscrapers were highlighted with extensive low relief sculptural ornament. One of the most unique elements of the Sullivanese style is the use of bold decorative bands with circular and geometric forms repeated in a symmetrical pattern. A notable example of this ornamentation, for which Sullivan was famous, is found on the National Farmer's Bank in Owatonna, Minnesota and represented locally on the front facade of the State. The use of large arches and casement windows arranged in a horizontal band can also be attributed to the Sullivanese style as well as Beaux Arts.

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California was the birthplace of the Mission style which was inspired by Old and New World Spanish buildings. Some California architects advocated the style as early as the 1880s and 1890s, but the style was mainly adopted by resort hotels and the Santa Fe railroad for its train stations. The stucco body of Loew's State Theater, its mission-shaped roof parapets and towering sides resemble the shape of a mission cathedral which inspired many of the Reids' theater designs.

**Summary Statement**

Loew's State Theater qualifies for the National Register of Historic Places for its contribution to the community's entertainment and theater history and its singular architecture designed by the noted San Francisco architects, James and Merritt Reid. Built for both vaudeville and films, the State bridged those two entertainment worlds and ushered in a new era of moving picture theaters in downtown Eureka. (Criterion A) The State's unique assemblage of Beaux Arts, Sullivanesque, and Mission features creates a distinctive and notable piece of architecture without parallel in Humboldt County. The building's monumental flat facade, large mass, and reinforced concrete construction are transformed into a distinctive piece of architecture by the Reid Brothers' application of decorative geometric bands, twin balconets with tracery design, shields, lion's heads and torches, all topped with their signature roof flags. (Criterion C) For its contribution to Eureka's entertainment history and the community's architectural heritage, Loew's State Theater deserves recognition as a National Register property.

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